



November 5, 2010

Los Angeles County Supervisors
Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration
Via email: Sachi Hamai, Executive Officer (shamai@bos.lacounty.gov)

RE: Support of Draft Single-use Bag Ordinance

Dear Los Angeles County Supervisors:

On behalf of Heal the Bay we write in strong support of the Draft Single-use Bag Ordinance (Draft Ordinance) released on October 28, 2010. The Draft Ordinance offers a comprehensive approach to address single-use bag pollution and will deter consumption of all single-use bags distributed at the point of sale at supermarkets, large retail pharmacies and food marts. The Draft closely resembles AB 1998 (Brownley) which the County supported in the past legislative session.

In January 2008, the Supervisors put stores on notice that significant bag reductions needed to occur or else the County would move forward with a ban. As significant reductions have not been realized, the time has come to ban plastic bags in Los Angeles County.

Plastic bags are the most ubiquitous consumer item designed to last for minutes but persist in our marine environment for hundreds of years. Approximately 60 to 80% of all marine debris and 90% of floating debris is plastic and comes from mostly land-based sources.¹ This plastic pollution poses a persistent threat to marine life. Over 267 species worldwide have been impacted by plastic litter.²

Los Angeles County residents use an estimated 6 billion single-use plastic bags every year. As proven over the last three years, we cannot recycle our way out of this problem and urgent action is needed to help reduce this pollution. Despite efforts to expand recycling programs, less than 5% of single-use plastic bags are currently being recycled.³ The rest of these bags inevitably end up in our landfills or as litter, clogging stormdrain systems, and make their way to our waterways and ocean.

¹ M. Gordon (2006) "Eliminating Land-based Discharges of Marine Debris in California: A Plan of Action from The Plastic Debris Project," Prepared by the California Coastal Commission (Available at: www.plasticdebris.org/CA_Action_Plan_2006.pdf).

² D.W. Laist (1997) "Impacts of marine debris: entanglement of marine life in marine debris including a comprehensive list of species with entanglement and ingestion records" In Coe, J.M., Rogers, D.B. (Eds.), *Marine Debris—Sources, Impacts, and Solutions*: Springer-Verlag, New York, 99-139.

³ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2005 Characterization of Municipal Solid Waste, Table 7; California Assembly Bill 2449 (Levine), statutes of 2007.



The cleanup of litter from single-use bags puts an additional strain on our economy. One study has estimated that the taxpayer cost to subsidize the recycling, collection, and disposal of plastic and paper bags could amount to as much as 17 cents per bag.⁴ This figure does not include the additional costs that local governments incur annually for cleaning littered streets, beaches and installing trash control devices to comply with total maximum daily load limits (TMDLs) for trash under the Clean Water Act. Also, plastic bags can clog catch basin inserts and screens thereby increasing local flood risks. The County of Los Angeles spends approximately \$4 million each year to cleanup 31 miles of beach.⁵ Littered streets and beaches also threaten California's ocean economy, valued at \$43 billion. An estimated 408,000 jobs mostly in the tourism and recreation sectors are tied to the ocean economy.⁶

We support the selection of Alternative 5 as the Environmentally Superior Alternative and the basis of the Draft Ordinance. Of note we believe that the Draft Ordinance will not result in any negative environmental impacts, as it will actually lead to an increase in the use of reusable bags that are a more sustainable alternative to single-use bags. The cost associated with paper bags should avoid any increase in their usage and GHG increases. Thus there will be no significant cumulative impacts.

The County made the commitment in 2008 to move forward with a plastic bag ban if reduction targets were not met. As the targets were clearly not met, the Supervisors must follow-through on the initial action. Los Angeles County has a critical role to play in becoming a true leader in eliminating plastic bag waste and preventing the proliferation of plastic pollution in our communities. The passage of the Draft Ordinance will be a major step in breaking our addiction to single-use bags.

Thank you for your leadership on this critical environmental issue,

Mark Gold, D. Env.
President

Kirsten James
Water Quality Director

⁴ City of San Francisco Dept of the Environment "[Bag Cost Analysis](#)" (Nov.18, 2004).

⁵ Draft Santa Monica Bay Nearshore and Offshore Debris TMDL. Accessed 11/2/2010.

⁶ Kidlow, J. et al. (July 2005). "California's Ocean Economy," report to the California Resources Agency, prepared by the National Ocean Economics Program.